Le vie dei sogni[1]: The Dreamlines

desert-line (*1)

Several years ago, down in the Parisian subway, I saw an airline advertisement that said:

Le chemin le plus court pour aller d'un point à un autre n'est pas la ligne droite, mais le rêve.

*proverbe malien (soninké)
Dingiranu fúlli do me maxa, killen defoye nta teloyen maxa, xa miiru

In English, this translates to:
"The shortest path to go from one point to another is not a straight line, but the dream."

In January 2025, I was in the small village of Tissardmine in the Moroccan Sahara, my second artist residency in the desert town. Two months later, I began my third residency at the Spitsbergen Kunstnersenter in Svalbard's Arctic desert.

The online maps indicate that the straight line between Longyearbyen and Tissardmine is 5,303.99 km. The dream is the path I followed with my nomadic art project, an installation of dreams collected from people around the world. After exhibiting this project in Longyearbyen as *Frozen Dreams: luminous voices in the night* in winter 2023 and *Thawing Dreams: voices are water* in Summer 2024, I added another chapter under a magnificent starry night in the Sahara desert.

How can we imagine a cartography of dreams? Would it be a map of time or space? Of land, air, water? Can we walk distances in dream spaces? Does a map of dreams contain roads? Rivers? Mountains? Lakes? Oceans?

"Arctic explorers recognised and reflected on the spectral aspects of being in the Arctic,"writes Shane McCorristine in The Spectral Arctic.[2] "This included having strange dreams, reveries, hallucinations and other supernatural experiences. ... Indeed, almost every nineteenth-century polar narrator touched on the subjects of mirages and illusions, whether referring to the shifting shapes of the ice or the strange way that sound travelled, or how small things in the distance seemed enormous."

'The ghost is a sign that the past has returned to the present, revealing, according to Jacques Derrida's formula, the "non-contemporaneity of present time with itself."[3]

The dream brings the past back to the present: in the dreams we shall live in the past or, maybe, in one of the possible futures. Is the dream a way of breaking down the time-line?

In the desert, mirages are visual, but the singing of the dunes are sonic mirages,[4] and they are real, because I recorded several seconds of them. Auroras borealis are also acoustic phenomena[5]: are the northern lights the luminous Frozen Words (*Paroles Gelées*) of Rabelais, which fell into Gargantua and Pantagruel's ship as they sailed along an icy sea, thawed and released the cries and clashes of a long-past battle?[6]

The desert is not a void. It is neither fragile nor ephemeral. It is powerful and slow, ancient, dense, mobile, alive and pulsating at a geological tactus. I have had very brief experiences in each, but I can draw a line between an arctic and an African desert. Real experience allows me to write a short list of their similarities and differences.

- The river/no river: it flows as a continuous-sounding bourdon as it thaws and does not flow because it is dry or frozen, and it is silent.
- Ancient stones and fossils are everywhere. Water, sun, and wind have spent millions of years shaping the mountains, which collapse into counterforts of boulders, stones, and pebbles. And these pillars fade away, far away, with the same slow and steady rhythm.
- The uniform colour-sepia and ochre at South, white and tawny at North- becomes multifaceted when the eye has adjusted and begins to perceive the infinite subtle nuances of shadow and light.
- Silence is not homogeneous. It becomes multifaceted when the ear has adapted and begins to perceive the infinite and subtle nuances of sounds, echoes, reverberations.
- Life is in the vibrant colours of tiny flowers, plants and mosses that grow where it seems impossible.
- Life is in the often invisible animals that live in hostile conditions.

You and I, we are for each other, a gratifying theatre[7]

Carrying a nomadic installation of dreams across the deserts is an ephemeral act.
At the heart of *Frozen Dreams* in Spitsbergen was the intention to create an ephemeral and fragile installation presented in an ephemeral and fragile environment.

Following ephemeral lines, I propose something equally fragile next to the dream. "The act of documentation performatively frames his actions as performance,"[8] writes Philip Auslander in the essay "Reactivations."[7] The concept of reactivation inspires me to create a narration of an

artistic event as an artistic performance. Here and now I am narrating an artistic performance project: here and now you are reading, and in this way you are participating in this event.

By writing and reading at the same moment, we create an artistic event entangled by a timeline.

Thawing Dreams, Spitsbergen Artist Center, July 2024 © photo Eugenio Pini

Notes

1. Le vie dei canti is the Italian title for Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*. "Chatwin asserts that language started as song, and in the Aboriginal Dreamtime, it sang the land into existence for the conscious mind and memory."
2. UCL Press, 2018.
3. Shane Mc Corristine, The Spectral Arctic, UCL Press, 2018. p.42
4. "For thousands of years, nomads traveling through deserts heard mysterious sounds they thought were made by ghosts or demons. Marco Polo reported that evil spirits 'at times fill the air with the sounds of all kinds of musical instruments, and also of drums and the clash of arms.' Today a non-occult explanation is available: those di-verse noises are all acoustic emissions produced by shifting sands." From "Booming Sand" by Franco Nori, Paul Sholtz and Michael Bretz. *Scientific American,* Vol. 202, No. 4 (April 1960).
5. Gamillo, Elizabeth. "Folklore meets science in this search for the 'sounds' of the northern lights." *Astronomy magazine*, July 2024. "Lors nous jeta sus le tillac pleines mains de paroles gelées, et semblaient dragée perlée de diverses couleurs. Nous y vîmes des mots de gueule, des mots de sinople, des mots de azur, des mots de sable, des mots dorés. Lesquels, être quelque peu échauffés entre nos mains, fondaient, comme neiges, et les oyons réellement." From *Gargantua and Pantagruel* ch. LVI, "Les paroles gelées II," by François Rabelais.

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7. “Satis enim magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus.” Epicure, quoted by Lucius Annaei Senecae in Epistulae moralis ad Lucilium
8. Auslander, Philip. “Reactivations.” *Essays on Performance and Its Documentation.* University of Michigan Press, 2008.

Frozen Dreams: Tissardmine Sahara oasis, January 2025 © photo Laura Londoño

*1 - https://archive.org/details/dr_europa-sttatenkarte-diercke-u-gaebler-schulatlas-fur-hohere-lehranstalt-0243053